
Operator Certification Requirements for water and wastewater treatment facilities

The State of Kansas, through the Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), administers a mandatory water and wastewater operator certification program. The program was begun in 1975 as a result of laws passed by the Kansas Legislature. The law requires all water supply systems and wastewater treatment facilities to be under the supervision of an operator certified by KDHE. The Legislature realized that proper operation of these facilities was essential to protect the health and environment of Kansans.

- **How the program is administered** – the program is administered through KDHE and provides for five certification levels for water operators, and five certification levels for wastewater operators. Every water supply system and wastewater treatment facility must be under the operational control of an operator certified at, or above the classification level of the system or facility. *See the last page for a listing of the criteria used to classify water supply systems and wastewater treatment facilities.*

There is currently no mandatory certification program for distribution system, collection system, or laboratory personnel.

In order to achieve certification, an individual must attain competency through study, training, and on-the-job experience. Once a minimum amount of experience has been gained, the individual must pass a written examination. Upon passing the written examination, KDHE will issue a certificate to the operator. The certificate must be renewed every two years. Prior to renewal, the operator must attain continuing education in some aspect of their certification area.

For additional information, please contact us at 785.296.5511.

Requirements *What is required of water and wastewater facility owners*

By law, it is the responsibility of water supply system and wastewater treatment facility owners to operate those facilities with an appropriately certified operator. Operating without a certified operator is considered an *unlawful act*.

To fully understand the law, we must first define what is meant by the terms *water supply system and wastewater treatment facility*. A water supply system is defined as the pipes, structures and facilities used to obtain, treat or distribute water to the public for use by humans. Simply put, this means that – wells, surface water intakes, pipelines to transport water from its source, units at a treatment facility, and pipes that distribute treated water to the public are considered parts of a water supply system. Therefore, any water supply system consisting of any one or more of these components, and offers water for use by humans, must be under the operational control of a certified water operator.

A wastewater treatment facility is defined as the facility or group of units provided for wastewater treatment. In straightforward terms, this means that any activities undertaken to treat wastewater are considered wastewater treatment. Examples include biological treatment processes like waste stabilization ponds, trickling filters, or activated sludge; sludge treatment; clarification; etc. Any facility consisting of one or more of these units must be under the operational control of a certified wastewater operator.

If a small system, class I or II water supply system or wastewater treatment facility loses its only certified operator, the owner may contract with another certified operator, or hire a non-certified individual as an *Operator-in-Training (OIT)*. **The owner must notify KDHE within 30 days of hiring the OIT.** The OIT has 18 months from the issuance of the OIT certificate to take the appropriate examination. If certification is not attained after one year, the OIT designation can be renewed for up to one additional year if the operator demonstrates progress in attaining certification.

Training *How you obtain the necessary training in Kansas*

Training is a vital part of the Kansas certification program. Training is helpful in obtaining initial certification, and it is mandatory for renewal of a certificate. Ten hours of training are required during every two-year renewal period for Class I – IV water and wastewater operators. Five hours of training are required every two years for Small Systems operators. Failure to attain the required continuing education will result in non-renewal of an operator's certificate.

Kansas is fortunate to have numerous quality training opportunities available. Training in Kansas is typically provided through the following outlets:

- Environmental Consulting Services (ECS), Fort Scott Community College (FSCC), Great Plains Institute (GPI), Kansas Laboratory Education (KLEA), Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA), Kansas Section American Water Works Association (KSAWWA), Kansas Water Environment Association (KWEA), Kansas Water Training (KWT), Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), and Salina Area Technical School (SATS). Copies of training schedules can be obtained from KDHE or a KDHE's web site: www.kdheks.gov/water/www.html
- The KDHE annual Water and Wastewater Operators School. The School is held each year around the first week of August in Lawrence, Kansas.
- In-house training, vendor training, and private training. Training falling in this category must be pre-approved by KDHE.

While the owner of a water supply system or wastewater treatment facility is not obligated to pay for their operator's training, many do so in order to maintain a certified operator. Regardless of the arrangement between the owner and operator, most training offered in Kansas is very reasonably priced.

System Classification

I. Water Supply System

Class	Description	Population Served
Small System	1. Distribution System Only 2. Chlorination of Groundwater only	All <501
I	1. Chlorination of Groundwater only 2. Treatment of Groundwater*	501-1,500 <501
II	1. Chlorination of Groundwater only 2. Treatment of Groundwater* 3. Treatment of Surface Water	1,501-5,000 501-2,500 <2,501
III	1. Chlorination of Groundwater only 2. Treatment of Groundwater or Surface Water*	5,001-20,000 2,501-10,000
IV	1. Chlorination of Groundwater only 2. Treatment of Groundwater or Surface Water*	>20,000 >10,000

II. Wastewater Treatment Facility

Class	Description	Population Served
Small System	1. Nonoverflowing Wastewater Pond	All
I	1. Any Secondary Facility** 2. Overflowing Wastewater Ponds	<1,001 All
II	1. Any Secondary Facility**	1,001-5,000
III	1. Any Secondary Facility** 2. Advanced or Specialized Facility**	5,001-25,000 <=5,000
IV	1. Any Secondary Facility** 2. Advanced or Specialized Facility***	>25,000 >5,000

* Includes iron and manganese removal; softening; membrane filtration; coagulation, sedimentation and filtration; recarbonation; and chemical addition (other than chlorine)

** Biological treatment including; trickling filters, rotating biological contactors, and activated sludge

*** Includes chemical, biological, or physical treatment to provide nutrient removal beyond secondary treatment; or effluent clarification

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